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CHINESE IN THE MOTHER LODE (1850-1870)

by

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For years the customs and behavior of the Chinese in California have been a mystery, subjected to many explanations, distorted by ignorance, colored by prejudice, and never fully understood by the average American.

As the world felt the excitement of gold being discovered in California the Chinese joined the deluge of men from many other nations besides our own to descend on the Golden Hills to try their luck in digging for the precious metal. Like most of the other people they came with the intention of finding a fortune and returning to their native land to enjoy it. Out of the growing yellow tide arose some of the most difficult problems Californians had to meet.

At the end of 1848 there were only seven Chinese registered in what was to be the state of California. By the middle of 1852 the new state showed some 20,000 Chinese on its rolls, and most of them were up in the mines. In the end their presence led to violent riots, to a whole political philosophy based on the slogan, "The Chinese Must Go". However, in the fifties real trouble had not yet begun. There were sporadic, usually ridiculous, efforts made to limit Chinese immigration; time and again some newspaper editor would lament the Oriental addiction to gambling and prostitution. It was tossed in the

teeth of the Chinamen that they were heathens, they sent their money home instead of circulating it in the state in which they found it, they did not bring their wives and families with them, that contagious leprosy and gross uncleanliness were general among them, that they were more dishonest and untrustworthy than white men, and that they were degraded to a dangerous extent by opium smoking. The animosity engendered over these assertions and their pigtails, shapeless dress, singsong language, and other peculiar practices which set them apart from the other forty-niners eventually subjected them to much persecution and finally expulsion from the gold fields.

In this paper an attempt is being made to point out the faults and peculiarities which made the Chinese so extremely obnoxious and objectionable to the people of early California and to recount some of the persecutions and contempt to which they were subjected by a supposedly Christian race by 1) showing the manners and customs of the "heathen Chinee" as early California saw him; 2) depicting him at work in the mining camps; and 3) relating the effect of the antagonisms built up through misunderstanding which finally led to his expulsion from the mines.

In keeping with the epoch and spirit of this paper, the author has resorted to terms in common use in the early history of California in referring to the Chinese and does not intend them as terms of infamy, disparagement, or ridicule.

I

THE HEATHEN CHINEE

1. Immigration

A few months after ~~John~~ James Marshall had picked up a lump of yellow ore in a millrace near Sutter's Fort and the news of Marshall's find had filtered to the outside world, California's rich hills became the goal for thousands of foreigners.

Until 1850 a mere handful of Chinamen had come to California. When the Chinamen heard of the mountains of gold across the great Eastern ocean, where masses of the precious metal were said to be lying around free for the taking, they went wild. To profit by the news, masters of foreign vessels and the Chinese merchants of Hong Kong and Canton circulated glowing reports and issued flaming advertisements spreading the word of the marvelous abundance of gold in California. A copy of a circular issued in the Chinese language, sent into the Canton area by a Chinese broker's office in Hong Kong who represented the foreign shipmasters, read in part:

> Americans are very rich people. They want the Chinaman to come and will make him welcome. There will be big pay, large houses, and food and clothing of the finest description. You can write your friends or send them money at any time, and we will be responsible for the safe delivery. It is a nice country, without mandarins or soldiers. All alike; big man no larger than little man. There are a great many Chinamen there now, and it will not be a strange country. China God is there, and the

> agents of this house. Never fear, and you will be lucky...[1]

The inducement of money without competition from the mandarins and soldiers seemed most attractive to the average Chinaman. China was in the midst of a very savage and bloody war--a war that started in 1849 and didn't end until 1864--the T'ai P'ing Rebellion. The average Chinaman's life at home was a continual round of oppression by the "big men" who robbed, taxed, and oppressed the Chinese at every turn. Many of the finest scholars and educated men of Canton, all first-class revolutionists, took this opportunity to escape with their lives.[2] Every pigtailed Chinaman who could beg, borrow, or steal passage money flocked to the Pacific coast like a swarm of bees, were he scholar, farmer, or common laborer. The consequence of this was the increase of the number of immigrants in 1852 to over 18,000.[3]

When the demand for ready-made clothing, food, lumber, and other provisions became enormous in the mining camps, the masters of many sailing vessels went to China for these supplies, which could be obtained more quickly from there than from the Atlantic seaboard. All extra deck space on these vessels was given over to passenger service to California. Seldom did a

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[1]McLeod, Alexander, Pigtails and Gold-dust, p.23.

[2]Glick, Carl, Shake Hands with the Dragon, p.288.

[3]Speer, William, The Oldest and the Newest Empire: China and the United States, p.486.

ship arrive that did not have every inch of extra space crowded with blue-coated Celestials bound for the gold fields.

The San Francisco newspapers, in reporting the arrival of these Celestials, seldom ascertained the names of the immigrants. They were coming so rapidly and were so indistinguishable in their garb, features, physical proportions, and deportment that they were always treated en masse as so many "pigtails" of Chinamen. Because of this there is no available record of who might lay claim to being real forty-niners.

2. Manners and customs

At first the pigtailed Chinaman was regarded as a novelty by the curious Californians. He added picturesquesness to the population and became an amusing spectacle to all who saw him. It became one of the favorite sports of the townsmen in the early fifties to go down to the docks on San Francisco's busy waterfront to watch the yellow horde pour forth. When the last man had walked down the gangway, they all departed for the Chinese quarter in the city before going their separate ways. Some went in wagons, more on foot. The streets leading to Chinatown were lined with them, running in "Indian file" and carrying their luggage suspended from the ends of bamboo poles slung across their shoulders. It was a quaint sight to see the tide of yellow men moving along in their blue blouses and loose baggy trousers, the skin of their heads pulled so tight by long braided queues of glossy black hair hanging down their backs

that they could scarcely wink their eyes.[4] Oftentimes the young bloods and small boys pelted them with rocks and mud, just for the fun of it.

Chinese had worn queues from the time of the overthrow of the Ming dynasty when they were forced to serve their Manchu masters and were compelled to adopt the Tartar style of dress and tonsure. By long and universal use, the queue became so nationalized that the Chinese would almost rather part with their heads than with their queue. Many of the Chinamen coming to California might have adopted the Western style of hairdress earlier if in California prisons the poor Chinaman had not met with double grief--the loss of his queue and of his liberty. The loss of his queue placed him in a dubious position in the eyes of his fellow countrymen; it would not be known without explanation whether it was evidence of his having served a prison term or of his having voluntarily adopted the American style of hairdressing.[5]

At least one half of the newcomers were married, but few brought their wives to America. At that time there was a strong sentiment in China against any respectable Chinese woman's leaving home even with her husband. Of the thousands of Chinese to arrive on the Pacific coast from 1848 to 1853 only fourteen were women. For the most part they were large

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[4] McLeod, Alexander, op. cit., pp.17-18.

[5] Ibid., p.27.

footed women of the working class, or women of disreputable character.[6]

The Chinese had a genius for accomplishing their purposes by indirect methods or by the use of conventions which were perfectly understood by themselves but puzzling to anyone else. Therefore they were frequently charged with insincerity, deception, and sly trickery.[7] Although they sometimes needed to be watched to prevent dishonesty and pilfering, when articles were committed to their care and their honor and better feelings were appealed to, they were punctiliously faithful. Sensitive to moral considerations, when cruelly maltreated and wronged they often became sullen and at last burst out in acts of self-destruction or desperate resistance.[8]

During the early days the Chinese in California lived in a typical Chinese social organization. Despite the fact that they were subjected to the influences of Western civilization, modern thought, American laws, and Christian teachings they remained changeless and unchangeable in form, features, and character as if in their daily lives they were but executing some monstrous decree of fate. Wherever they settled down, they put up their heathen temples, and brought with them a code of laws which their chiefs enforced upon them with relentless

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[6] Ibid., p.25.

[7] Crow, Carl, The Chinese Are Like That, p.112.

[8] Speer, William, op. cit., p.502.

vigor. Here a Celestial empire was founded, ruled by men often uneducated and unscrupulous, who governed their subjects by secret tribunals, by imposing severe penalties, and then executing their decrees in the very shadows of American law and justice. In California these strange people existed under a Chinese government not unlike that under which they had lived in their native land, an association known as the Six Companies and organized from the six areas of China, which served as a court for the Chinese people in settling their differences and bringing them together. Their mode of living was the same as they and their ancestors had pursued for centuries in their fierce struggle with nature for subsistence.

In their long recorded history, which covers a period of several thousand years, Chinese have never lived in isolated homesteads. More than two thousand years ago, they lived under physical conditions comparable to that of the American apartment house, but the social surroundings were quite different. In China those who were thrown together to live in the crowded villages were relatives, all members of the same clan. This neighborliness became something to be taken for granted. Chinese people got into the habit of living in crowds, learned to adapt themselves to crowded conditions and to like it. Small wonder that they continued to live under conditions described as "rabbit-warrens" by their Caucasian neighbors. However neat and clean the individual Chinaman appeared to be, collectively they herded together in the closest quarters,

sleeping as many as could be packed into a space, without ventilation, and they lived surrounded by filth that smelled to heaven.[9]

It was a matter of wonder to the Americans that there was so little drunkenness among the Chinese. It was their universal custom to take a small quantity of their rice-whiskey after dinner. They sometimes became somewhat merry at the table, and sometimes even intoxicated, but while drunken men of every other nation might be seen reeling, swearing, or behaving indecently in the streets of the cities and towns of California, a drunken Chinese was never seen.[10]

Although there were occasional fights between men of different companies, who cherished the old animosities of their native villages, the Chinese were by far the most industrious and peaceable race in California. There were fewer murderous brawls among them than among any other people. One of the most comical sights of the diggings was to see a couple of Chinamen disputing over a contested claim. The noise and gesticulation were frightful. Their arms would extend in every direction, with hooked fingers indicating numbers and dates. All the friends of the parties would take a share in the dispute, which became intelligible only when the breath of the disputants was thoroughly exhausted and their catgut voices died to a

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[9]Eldredge, Zoeth S., ed., History of California, p.310.

[10]Speer, William, op. cit., p.635.

whisper. There was no blood shed in their quarrels, however, and they were very wary in coming to blows--a terrible tumult being the sum of any harm done in their disputes.[11]

There were good and bad Chinamen in those days. Their favorite rascality was the robbing of the sluice boxes. Sometimes the miners did not clean up their washings for several days or weeks at a time, but left the gold with the debris at the bottom of the sluices, and frequently some Chinaman would clean out the boxes at night when no one saw him. Unfortunately for them, six of their number were caught at this pastime one Saturday night on French Hill by those who were watching for them. Two were brought before the post and given fifty lashes each, and their queues were cut off. The others escaped the avengers. This taught both the good and bad Chinamen a lesson. The latter were induced to be more sly in their stealing or more especially clever in their escaping, while the former were not backward in the future in tying to a tree and whipping any of their number whenever an occasion demanded it.[12]

There are many tales about how the Chinese used to rob sluice boxes, and he was said to rob hen roosts as well; in any event hen roosts were sometimes robbed, and the poor Chinaman had to bear the blame. However, in most important matters they were honest and fair and just. There is an anecdote from Downieville of 1857 which well illustrates to what oddities

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[11] McLeod, Alexander, op. cit., p.44.
[12] Ibid., p.69.

they would resort to see that justice was done. It seems as though some Chinese near Goodyear's Bar bought a Missouri mule to help them bring some logs down to make a wing dam to get water to their sluice boxes. They couldn't make the mule understand their profanity and when all other means failed, one of the Chinese kicked him. The mule kicked back, kicking so hard that it killed the Oriental. A trial was held; witnesses were called in. They agreed that the man was dead but they could not agree as to which of the mule's hind legs had dealt the blow. Finally it was decided to kill the mule; they took off both hind feet and carried those out to the refuse heap, and so the ends of justice were served.[13]

Behind the innocent exterior of the Celestial was hidden much cunning, and the white men who were tempted to make him the butt of their jokes or to take unfair advantage of him often found themselves the victim. For example, one day a Chinaman entered a store, picked up a boot and examined it attentively. When told the price was ten dollars a pair, the Chinaman offered the shopkeeper five, for he dearly loved to bargain. The shopkeeper looked at the heathen contemptuously, then agreed to let him have it for five dollars; but when the poor Chinaman paid his money and attempted to take the other boot, the shopkeeper restrained him, saying that he had sold him only one boot--the other would cost five dollars more.

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[13]Lee, Hector, "Campfire Tales of Northern California, no.7, The Chinese Poem", Radio Broadcast, Nov. 28, 1959.

Before the faintest suspicion of what he was about to do crossed the mind of the shopkeeper, the Chinaman drew his knife and cut the boot he had bought into shreds, threw it on the floor, and walked out of the shop, thus spoiling the pair for future sale.[14]

One of the reasons it was hard for the Oriental to become assimilated and later became a practical difficulty in connection with his employment was the slowness and labor with which he learned English. Its polysyllabic character and the combination of several consonants in a single syllable made it difficult for him to pronounce. Yet many Chinese spoke it fluently.

Another difficulty which sometimes arose in employing the yellow men stemmed from their clannish disposition. This led them to act in concert for the accomplishment of their purposes and to indulge in hostility toward their countrymen with whom they were at feud.[15]

Although there were no real doctors among the Chinese at the mines, they used their own herbs and remedies for minor ailments. When one of their number became seriously ill or suffered grave injury, he went or was sent to San Francisco, sometimes dying en route. At one of the mines there was grave concern when a Chinese went to San Francisco for medical advice

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[14]McLeod, Alexander, op. cit., p.45.

[15]Speer, William, op. cit., p.502.

and word came back that his malady had been diagnosed as leprosy. Undoubtedly the fear of contracting leprosy from the Chinese was accentuated by the unpleasant references to them in the local newspapers.[16] The newspapers had a heyday with the Chinese issue when their nuisance value reached its ascendancy.

The Chinese as a race are intensely religious, and this held true back in the early mining era. Wherever they went they carried with them the faith of their fathers and the shrines of their favorite and patron gods. No matter how temporary their abode, they would immediately set up an altar for the object of their faith. Consequently there was a temple wherever a number of Chinese were found. At one time, Chinese Camp had three Joss houses in town, large structures filled with carvings and images covered with gold leaf--rich and surprisingly luxurious, but, by a strange contrast, provided with no floor but the hard-packed earth.[17] These beautiful things were paid for by the Chinese laborers out of the few cents a day that they made at their labor. There was no stated time for worship; their votaries arranged their own time for paying homage to the sacred shrines. The josses were nothing more than deified men who, while living, had rendered great service to their country.[18]

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[16]Goss, Helen Rocca, Life and Death of a Quicksilver Mine, p.71.

[17]Paden, Irene D. and Schlichtmann, Margaret E., Big Oak Flat Road, p.72.

[18]Chew, Ng Poon, "Chinese in Los Angeles", Land of Sunshine, p.102

The Chinese used charms and other superstitious means to avert the anger of their gods and prevent the malicious injuries to themselves and their families by evil spirits.

The characteristic and favorite religion of the Chinese was the worship of ancestors and the spirits of the dead. The elaborate and, to the white miners' way of thinking, outlandish ceremonies which they practised in this worship further set them apart from any community in which they found themselves. Eyewitness accounts of a typical Chinese funeral in the early mining camps reveal the interest engendered by these strange proceedings. One eyewitness tells of how every American attending the funeral of one Kwong Wo, a prominent Chinese merchant, was given a ten cent piece and some incense for good luck. Boys old enough to know better would line up in the procession, get their ten cents, then crawl through the fence and get at the end of the procession again to receive another dime. When a funeral was held, the road to the grave was strewn with hundreds of strips of perforated red paper, the theory being that evil spirits had to pass through all of the holes before reaching the soul of the departed. Roast pork and many other foods were always left at the grave. The foods were taken to the cemetery in the early morning, left throughout the day so that the spirits could consume as much as they desired, then taken back to the camp and devoured by the mourners in the evening.

Bodies did not rest many years in this country. Periodically the remains were exhumed and sent back to China to remain

forever among their ancestors. Another eyewitness account of an exhumation relates:

> A priest or important official would come from San Francisco. He would walk slowly, single file, with several others to the graveyard. They wore fine Chinese clothing and hung bright-colored banners on the shrubs around the grave they had come to open. Then they chanted and gestured for a time. The officials brought Chinese laborers to do the actual digging but they were most particular to see that every tiny bone was gathered. A piece of silk was spread at one side of the grave and the bones placed on that. When every single one was found and accounted for they were placed in a small wooden box which was given to the Chinese priest with a good deal of ceremony and they all went back to Chinatown. The box was always the length of the human thigh-bone; the contents were scraped clean and the cue was carefully placed on top just before the box was sealed.[19]

Only the bones of the men were disinterred. Where the women were buried was immaterial.

Another story of the superstitious Chinese comes our way from Calaveras County, concerning a group of Chinese miners who were celebrating Chinese New Year. Many candles were lighted by the Chinese to frighten the demons away. Three young girls of the town passed by the camp, stole several candles and ran home. When the loss was discovered the Chinese raised loud cries of astonishment and fear. They evidently believed demons had taken the candles for when morning came not one remained in the area. They had all moved out during the night.[20]

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[19] Paden and Schlichtmann, op. cit., p.137.

[20] Young, Joy, "Double Springs Ranch and Court House", 3rd Annual Essay Contest on Calaveras History, n.p.

Though the Chinese brought some of their vices to the diggings, such as gambling and opium smoking, their greatest vice in the eyes of the white miners was that of hoarding their gold like misers. Some authorities tell us that all the gold they found invariably went into the hands of other Chinamen and eventually to China as they spent very little of it in the communities. They would purchase some provisions, such as flour, fresh pork and a few edibles which they could not get from China. About the only American articles of dress they adopted were the heavy mining boots worn by all miners. When a Chinaman landed in the diggings, his first purchase would be a pair of these boots. When buying these he would pick out the largest boots he could find for his money, regardless of fit, for he always wanted full value when he made purchases at the mine stores. The appearance of a single file of Chinamen tacking up a muddy hill with their newly purchased miners' boots on their feet presented a never-to-be-forgotten sight.

Yet other authorities, backing up their findings with written testimony from merchants in the mining regions, declare that the merchants all through the Mother Lode did a lively trade with the Chinese for American goods, and many of them were dependent almost entirely on them for their business. Their trade was considered valuable for the Chinese bought almost entirely for cash, and they were generally prompt in meeting their contracts. They were shrewd and close dealers, but spent their money freely for luxuries and comforts. The

merchants found that the Chinaman, as long as he had money, would purchase when the expense was such as to deter Americans.[21]

The Chinese made industrious residents of the settlements, kept to themselves and took care of their own indigent, if any. The only drawback seemed to be that dozens of them had the same name. There were so many called Lim, Chew, Hoy or Hong that it became simpler to describe them, so the records of the accounting books show: Blind Chinaman, Squint Eye, Lame One, Flat Nose, and many more.

To the average Chinaman a pipe or two of opium was as pure a relaxation as the drinking of a highball to his white brethren.[22]

While it is clear that women did not figure greatly in the existence of these hard-working Chinese, the gambling vice did play a considerable part in their lives. They bet upon dice, lots, tosses of a coin, and many other methods of appeal to their gods of fortune. The most popular form of gambling found wherever the Chinese settled down was the inevitable fan-tan game, which would go on for hours with its monotonous sing-song. Professional Oriental gamblers toured the diggings regularly, raking in what they could. Because the men had no amusements of a more wholesome nature, minor gambling games

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[21] Speer, William, op. cit., p.528.

[22] Dobie, Charles Caldwell, San Francisco's Chinatown, p.100.

probably went on all the time, with whatever funds were left after the professionals had completed their work.

However, freely granting the fundamental honesty and industry of the man from China, a large Oriental quarter in a mining town did not add to its moral tone. They were quick to establish gambling shacks, to bring prostitutes into the settlement, to bring opium along as a matter of course and to sell it openly. When approached with approbrium by reform-minded citizens, they did not under any circumstances speak English. Despite the miners' feelings about the opium brought in by the Chinese, they in turn did not care for their American neighbors' whiskey nor for their morphine, which was equally easy to purchase.[23]

3. Chinese wars

Two of the most bizarre occurrences of the whole gold rush era were the two Chinese Wars which took place within the boundaries of the state. Because the Chinese were at the front of every Californian's mind, the battles took on an added significance far greater than they deserved and became a part of the great legend of the Gold Rush.

Weaverville, in Trinity County, was a prosperous town in 1854. There was a large Chinatown which included four stores, four gambling saloons, and a restaurant, and the Chinese were arousing envy by their fine clothes and high

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[23]Paden and Schlichtmann, op. cit., p.72.

living. Now and then a white man would try one of their gambling games, though not often, since the Chinese maintained no bars in such establishments. The town was just recovering from their annual Fourth of July celebration followed by the sitting of the District Court, so Weaverville was in the mood to prolong its two-week spree of excitement when the blacksmiths suddenly found themselves swamped with orders for curious and outlandish implements whose purpose they could not mistake. The customers were all Chinese and the implements were of two classes--offensive and defensive weapons. Within an hour the word went around--the Chinese were going to fight a war.

Although the Chinamen were timorous, unwarlike, and easily imposed upon by the white miners and inhabitants of the hills, they frequently had quarrels among themselves in which no cowardice or brotherly love was ever shown to one another. This particular quarrel originated in sectional hatred and clannish differences brought from their native land, a hatred which gradually increased to such an extent that all endeavors of their leaders or Americans to settle their differences amicably were in vain. For several months previously there had been much trouble between the two factions, resulting one day in the killing of one of the Cantonese and peace ceased to become a virtue with the Cantons. They challenged their neighbors, the Hong Kongs, to a regular pitched battle to come off a month later--in order to give both sides a chance to prepare for war!

For a week before the fight both parties paraded the streets, practising jabs and sweeps, making the nights hideous with their warlike yells. One group was dressed in red with long scarlet cloths wound around their heads. They carried a white banner with the inscription of their company on it. The other group wore hats of sheet-iron resembling funnels and carried a red and black banner inscribed "Canton City Company". On both sides the chief weapon was a fifteen-foot pike. The local blacksmith made hundreds of these weapons for both factions at a good price. In fact, when the sheriff threatened to have him indicted for manufacturing weapons intended to do bodily harm, he told him to ahead as the five hundred dollar fine prescribed by law would still leave him a respectable profit. Since he was only one of many working day and night to arm the Chinese, the sheriff let him go. As for the other weapons, these ranged from three-pronged spears to horrid swords five feet long, set in six-foot handles of wood, which the Chinese swung about their heads with both hands. Others carried big brush scythes of a wicked looking nature. On both sides the fighters who were to occupy the front ranks had short stabbing-swords and round shields, some of iron and some of thickly plaited straw. At the head of each pike were tied several red silk ribbons. Some of the combatants carried their swallow-tailed dragon banners floating in the breeze.

Oddly, from the white man's point of view, there were no physical encounters during these preliminaries. The whole

affair was conducted throughout with beautiful formality and a precision peculiar to the Oriental mind. It would have been contrary to Chinese etiquette to go farther than the proper, formal boasting and challenging until the correct moment arrived.

The day appointed for the battle found the entire village full of hostile, pigtailed Chinamen--a complete gathering of the clans. The military spirit ran high among the followers of Confucius. Miners from all parts of the diggings came to see the fun. It was a gala day for Weaverville; all the bars served special Chinese drinks and kept open house, serving Canton high-balls and Hong Kong slings to the thirsty spectators.

The understanding between the whites and the Chinese was that no firearms would be used by either side in the pending battle, but that the fighting was to be done with their own crude implements of war. As the afternoon wore on, the white miners became restless. The hostile armies stood facing each other, but no combat had taken place. According to the rules for warfare there must first be a correct marching and counter-marching, each side attempting to impress the other with its tactics. There was a lot of yelling in high-pitched voices from both sides--each casting slurs upon the other's ancestors in their feline language.

Despite these maneuverings, the general concensus was that the Cantons would win, although they were outnumbered, for they had concluded a secret agreement with the white men to cover their weak flank by crowding in on that side under

the guise of getting a better view of the battle. None of the opposing force would dare force their way through the close-packed miners from the rear, for they had been given to understand that if any of them injured a white man in this war, the miners would kill every Chinaman on both sides. Finally it was rumored that there was going to be no fight, but the miners were not to be cheated out of their fun. The ground where the battle was to take place was full of washed gravel--rocks of all sizes were abundant. After waiting until their patience was exhausted, forty or fifty miners got behind each army and began throwing rocks to drive them together and make them fight, whether they wanted to or not.[24] In the meantime another party of whites maneuvered between the two divisions of the Hong Kongs and would not let one division take part in the battle. When the Cantons saw that things had been turned in their favor, they charged and the big battle was on. When the Hong Kongs saw their support cut off, they broke and ran, leaving their wounded lying on the field. As each Canton warrior passed the wounded Hong Kongs he would plunge his pike or dart into the unfortunate victims who had fallen in the charge. The entire operation had lasted perhaps ten minutes.

Casualties were light, however; eight Chinese were dead and another half dozen were wounded severely enough to need a doctor's care. Surprisingly, one white man had been killed

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[24]McLeod, Alexander, op. cit., pp.48-52.

and the miners were inclined to be incensed about it until bystanders came forth with the true facts. A Swede had been standing on a log with a six-shooter in his hand, shooting the combatants indiscriminately, just for a lark. Some white miner shot him from behind--he fell over with a bullet in his brain and never knew what hit him. The general sentiment of Weaverville was that "if the Chinese wish to fight among themselves and kill each other, the people here are perfectly willing".[25]

Thus ended the China War in Trinity County for a time, but not in other mining districts. However, there was only one other Chinese War considered important enough to deserve the name, when war broke out in Tuolumne County two years later. Some two thousand Chinese found themselves unable to settle their differences without resorting to the same proclamations and violent threats, the same solemnity of ritualistic marchings and countermarchings, that had distinguished the quarrel of their northern brothers. This war cost in the neighborhood of $60,000 raised by a "war chest" from monies donated to Chinese leaders by working miners.[26]

This was no mere local squabble. A notice was inserted in the Columbia Gazette by the Sam Yups, who were generally considered the scholars and merchants, to the Yang Wos at

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[25]Jackson, Joseph Henry, Anybody's Gold, p.218.

[26]"History of Chinese in Tuolumne is Speaker's Topic", Stockton Record, Feb. 1, 1960, p.18.

Chinese Camp, which read in part:

> There are a great many now existing in the world who ought to be exterminated. We, by this, give you a challenge, and inform you beforehand that we are the strongest and you are too weak to oppose us. We can therefore wrest your claim, or anything else from you, and give you notice that it is our intention to drive you away before us and make you ashamed of yourselves. You are nothing compared to us... You won't stand like men; you are perfect worms; or, like the dog that sits in the door and barks but will go no further. If you won't accept the challenge, we tell you, by the way, to go and buy lots of flour, and paint your faces; then go in your houses, shut the doors and hide yourselves, and we'll kill every man of you that we come across. Shame! Shame![27]

So challenged, all Yang Wos within reach were bound to join in the fight against the Sam Yups or lose face. Likewise, all Sam Yups that could get to Chinese Camp must report for duty; such a challenge once issued must be upheld.

This war originated in a dispute among approximately eighteen miners from both factions when some Yang Wos, working side by side with a group of Sam Yups at Two-Mile Bar on the Stanislaus River near Knight's Ferry, rolled a large rock out of their way which came to rest on the Sam Yup claim. The all-important matter of "face" made it necessary that neither group should give in, and before many days had passed the dispute grew out of bounds.[28]

Preparations were much like those in the north, with a few extra trimmings thrown in. The Sam Yups sent to San

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[27] Jackson, Joseph Henry, op. cit., p.220.

[28] Ibid., p.221.

Francisco for muskets, powder and ball, so that some of their soldiers might have the advantage of the white man's weapons. Then, as the Sam Yups did not know how to fire the muskets, they hired white miners, at ten dollars a day and whiskey, to act as instructors. Fifteen of these are said to have painted themselves yellow, hung three-foot horsehair queues from their heads and actually marched into battle, at what rate of pay no one knows.[29] Although about a hundred shots were fired in this war, the casualty list stood at four dead and four wounded. When the two armies had had their fill of marching, poking, slicing, and thrusting, the sheriff and his aide had no trouble disarming both factions and sending them home. Later each Chinaman confessed he had been a fool to fight and would not do so again for anybody. Undoubtedly the face-savers began to regret the forty dollars they had been forced to contribute for "the privilege" of joining the fray. One of the warriors, resplendent in a suit of armor made of sardine cans, was one of the victims. His armor did not stand up well against musket fire.[30]

The white miners' view of the war was best expressed by a bored journalist who reported the affair for the San Francis-can Bulletin: "It was a very bad battle as so few were killed."[31]

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[29] Ibid., p.221.

[30] "Chinese History in Tuolumne Told; Collie Torture; Tong War Described", Stockton Record, Mar. 31, 1958, p.19.

[31] Jackson, Joseph Henry, op. cit., p.222.

The small number of casualties in these Chinese Wars should not be taken as an indication of cowardice on the part of the combatants, however. The nerve, or lack of nerve, as shown in their dueling shows that on occasion they were capable of the most cold-blooded savagery and would slash each other to pieces with diabolical zeal. One such duel was fought in the spring of 1851 between a number of Chinamen working a claim on the Mokelumne River over a dispute about money matters. Twenty pigtailed miners were locked in a dark room armed with knives and iron bars. The result was the slaying or maiming of most of them. How they distinguished friend from foe remains a mystery, but to do so was part of the performance.[32]

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[32] McLeod, Alexander, op. cit., p.55.

II

IN THE DIGGINGS

The Chinamen who went to the mining districts of California had a disposition to hold aloof from the white race. Soon they became truly and in every sense aliens. With their incomprehensible language, their strange customs and their heathen religion, they found little friendliness in either acts or looks from many of their American and European neighbors. These aliens usually did not even rub elbows with their white neighbors in the hill country. Their camps were always apart from town. They were mild, inoffensive, and docile to a provocative point. As a result, they became the target of abuse, very much as a cringing dog who wags his tail in the face of brutality. A California tramp of the fifties records that he heard an apparently fair man say that once when out of funds in the mining regions, he sat on the roadside waiting for a Chinaman to come along that he might rob him! He thought no more of it than knocking over a jackrabbit to satisfy his hunger. To him a Chinaman was a biped only by virtue of a jest of nature which had provided him with two legs instead of four.[33] On another occasion a miner recorded in his diary

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[33]Dobie, Charles Caldwell, op. cit., p.49.

that as Christmas was approaching and he lacked money, he robbed a Chinaman so that he might properly observe the festival of peace on earth, goodwill to men![34]

The "Johns", as the miners soon came to call them, early learned that to show much aggression in trying to locate new claims was not to be their lot. They had to content themselves with working the old placers the white miners had abandoned and accepting a "take" of five or six dollars a day as fair gain.

The effort and initiative displayed by the Orientals, mainly untraveled and speaking no language but their own, on their passage up the river to Stockton was tremendous. The trudge from there to the mines was another chore not lightly discounted, particularly since they made this long trek in stiff American boots which were sheer torture to them until they became accustomed to them. There were few, if any, helping hands on their journey inland. It was not that they were uniquely unwelcome; they were entirely unknown to any but seafaring men and world travelers at this time. The first Celestials to show up in the diggings were regarded tolerantly as curiosities. Their pigtails, shapeless dress, singsong language, and other peculiarities gave most forty-niners the impression that the Chinese were irresistibly comic.[34]

Early in the Gold Rush it occurred to a ship's captain

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[34]Caughey, John Walton, Gold is the Cornerstone, p.195.

to persuade some Chinese from the crew of a stranded ship to wash gold for him at Campo Salvador. Here on the timber-grown height above Woods Creek the Chinese built a queer dwelling after their own fashion. It soon formed a nucleus for Chinese who drifted in from other diggings or who came straight from the harbor of San Francisco. Naturally the Caucasians pushed in to Campo Salvador to see if the Chinese had uncovered anything worth their while, saw the gleam of gold and stayed. Whereupon, in 1850, the Orientals moved on.[35]

This soon became the procedure all through the gold region. Sometimes, as in this case, they seem to have chosen to leave. Sometimes they were more less peacefully elbowed out; all too often they were robbed or driven out by violence without regard for common justice or humanity. Although this was deplored by the majority of decent miners, before the coming of organized government to the camps either prevention of crime or its retribution depended upon the busy miners themselves. It usually took murder or horse stealing to stir them to action.

When the Chinese moved on they found a group of Americans mining in a sketchy little settlement known as Camp Washington. This settlement absorbed the incoming Orientals and was soon known as Chinese Camp. As the Chinese were driven from other camps in the area, notably from Sonora, they congregated here.

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[35]Paden and Schlichtman, op. cit., p.68.

The diggings were rich but dry, with no water readily available for sluicing out the gold, which may be one reason why the industrious and patient Chinese were able to make a success of their project at the location with little interference from the white miners at that time. The colony grew until it was generally accepted that the Mongolian population numbered several thousand and four of the famous Chinese Six Companies sent their agents to the spot. At first the gold-bearing dirt was hauled to a creek some distance away and there sluiced out. When it was evident that this process was paying, the white miners edged in but the Chinese were too numerous and too well established to be easily displaced, so they worked together amicably. The American miners brought more efficient methods to the site. After paying fifteen dollars a cartload to have dirt hauled to the creeks, they decided to dig ditches and bring the water to them. They then worked the diggings superficially and in a few years moved on.

The Chinese, who had calmly waited for this to happen, panned out the tailings and reaped a fair harvest from the gold which the rough and hasty methods of the Americans had wasted.[36]

As their skill with the pick and shovel improved, the Orientals sometimes made lucky strikes in the abandoned claims. They even undertook large and extensive projects, such as the

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[36] Ibid., p.70.

large wing dam they constructed across the Yuba River at Mississippi Bar to reach the rich paying gravel of the river bed. After months of labor they did not find the returns to each man very great, but the yield altogether was very large.[37]

Another use made of the current of the river in mining the bars by the Chinese miners was the turning of a water wheel to pump the waters from the gravels beneath the surface of the river. The water thus raised was used to wash the gravels as they were shoveled into the sluicing flume. The water wheels, which began to be erected prior to 1854, had become by 1861 one of the main sources of water for sluicing and washing the gravels on nearly every river bar in Trinity County.[38]

In a land as rich in gold as those of the California mining districts very few Celestials made individual strikes that equaled those of the other nationalities who were running over the country and picking gold from the earth here and there. However, they could not help but be fortunate at times. At Moores Flat, in the Yuba River district, two poor ignorant Johns, who had never made over two dollars a day working on an abandoned claim, found a 240-pound nugget of gold worth over $30,000. Some of their fellow countrymen working on the middle fork of the Feather River found a forty-pound nugget on another abandoned claim. To avoid excitement and the

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[37] McLeod, Alexander, op. cit., p.42.

[38] Cox, Isaac, Annals of Trinity County, p.210.

possibility of the nugget's being claimed by the original mine owners, the Celestials chiseled it up into small pieces and sold it with their other gold dust.[39]

The Chinese who found valuable nuggets were few in number, but they did recover a vast amount of gold dust from claims that the white miners refused to work, and as time went on, no river bar, creek, or mining camp was complete without a Chinese camp on its outskirts, where a continual cackling of discordant voices and a brazen beating and drumming of Celestial music was heard in the evenings.

Thus early mining days found the Chinaman very well established as a law-abiding citizen of the many districts in California. Usually they lived in tents or shacks made of scrap lumber, flattened out kerosene cans, anything they could lay their hands on, as did their white neighbors in the temporary diggings. As the communities settled down and became more or less permanent, their abodes became more permanent also, usually being constructed of frame or adobe. Early in the history of the settlement of Knight's Ferry, the weird Chinese shacks looked flimsy but were exceedingly adhesive. Each successive house had but three walls and was added on the side wall of its predecessor. The Chinese builder was accustomed to put in ten nails where the American would use but one; therefore, Chinatown was a solid unit almost a block long made

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[39]McLeod, Alexander, op. cit., p.43.

up of cubicles. Once in awhile a fire would sweep away the whole odd-smelling affair. The minute a blaze started, the entire Chinese colony would rush for the river, pigtails and shirttails flying, and stay there until it was over. Meanwhile the volunteer fire department would be unable to save their houses as they could not pull the units apart with their grappling hooks.

No one, however, questioned their frugality or industry. During the persistently wet season of 1851-52, when wagon traffic was hopelessly bogged down, the Chinese, weighted with fantastically heavy burdens swung from poles and neck yokes kept the supply line moving between Stockton and the Ferry. Without the Chinese, the settlement would have been close to starvation.[40]

In other mountain communities during the open season the Chinese brought eggs from the outlying ranches in bobbing baskets slung at either end of carrying poles.

Business in some of the small mining camps would be wholly suspended during the summer months were it not for the Chinese. They were content to work laboriously for two dollars a day and work claims which no others would. They made good hands and were frequently hired by the white miners who considered them both industrious and inoffensive. The richer mines--all owned by the whites--were often poorly supplied

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[40]Paden and Schlichtmann, op. cit., p.30.

with water; little work could be done, and little gold therefore was taken. All the time the patient and plodding Johns were delving among the rocks and ravines of the foothills, in places where a white man would starve rather than work at all, packing water in buckets to rock out their six bits a day to buy their daily provender and pay the tax-gatherer for the privilege of working. During the dry season, if they were unable to salvage gold, they might be seen making repairs, digging and collecting the dirt into the best situations to take advantage of the coming rise of water, or at other work.

In the employment of the white people they proved of great value at quartz-mining. Rock which could not be worked by white labor, with wages averaging seven dollars a day, could be made profitable when Chinese could be had to extract the ore and deliver it at the mill at two dollars or less. Thus districts which had been almost abandoned revived and all classes of the population were directly benefited, for although the laboring class of the whites objected to the low wages paid to the Chinese, yet the possibility of carrying on mining operations furnished them with better employment and sustained life in the community.

Among the various colors, creeds, and cultures represented, the mere fact of cohabitation in the diggings led to a certain amount of interchange of ideas and influences. Thus the Indians began to wear hats, coats, shirts, and trousers, though not always at the same time; the French turned from

Parisian and peasant styles to rough boots and shirts; the American forty-niners began to speak a smattering of Spanish; basic American profanity enriched the speech of Indians and Chinese. These were lendings and borrowings made without volition and without charge or prejudice. Nevertheless the climate of opinion toward the foreigners in the diggings is perhaps best described as variable. From a thoroughly democratic willingness to accept individuals on the basis of ability as demonstrated in performance, the attitude ranged through amusement at outlandish practices, to indifference, condescension, discrimination, and cruelty.

Undoubtedly the principal aggravation the Chinese gave the miners was their enormous immigration, coupled with the fact that they insisted on remaining Chinese. This made the immigration more noticeable and it was quickly observed that if Chinese immigration continued at an increase of several hundred per cent a year California would soon be a suburb of Shanghai. There might have been some truth in this, but hoodlumism and murder were not the proper methods of stopping the immigration. Among the hoodlum element in the mines neither a Chinaman's life nor his property was safe from day to day.

Pigtails probably cost more Chinese lives than even their success in mining abandoned claims and making money out of them. The miners firmly believed the legend that Chinese preserved these pigtails because they expected to be drawn up

to heaven by them. When the Chinese did not go to the mines, they were often assigned women's work, perhaps with subconscious reference to the long braided pigtails.

It was fairly safe to murder a Chinese or to jump his claim and completely safe to insult or assault one. Although the first constitution of the state of California provided that foreigners should enjoy the same rights of property as the native born citizens, one of the California statutes of 1849 provided that "no black or mulatto person or Indian shall be permitted to give evidence in favor of or against any white person". Later, Chief Justice Murray of the California Superior Court was called upon to clear the question relative to a Chinese being given the right to appear in court with testimony against his persecutors. To the question, "What is an Indian?" the judge said:

> "Indian as commonly used, refers only to the North American Indians, yet in the days of Columbus all shores washed by Chinese waters were called the Indies, therefore all Asiatics were Indians. In the second place the word 'white' necessarily excludes all other races than Caucasian; and in the third place, even if this were not so, I would decide against admitting the testimony of the Chinese on grounds of public policy."[41]

Furthermore, many objected to the Chinese being accorded the right of giving testimony in American courts because they were heathen and the method of administering the oath to a witness in a court of American law would have no power in the

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[41] McLeod, Alexander, op. cit., p.62.

Chinaman's mind to make him speak the truth.

Therefore, during the early fifties the Chinamen had no more standing in our American courts than did the lowly Digger Indians, who were regarded as the lowest form of human life on this continent. And under Judge Murray's ruling that all Asiatics were Indians, many barbarous and cruel wrongs were committed against the Chinamen in the mining camps, such as would scarcely have been imagined could occur in a civilized Christian country.

It was not always Americans who committed these barbarous and cruel wrongs. A crowd of villains of every country and complexion--English convicts from Australia, Spanish and Mexican robbers, low and vicious white foreigners of other nations--hung on the skirts of the laborious Chinese. They went in gangs and made robbery a business. Keeping out of sight of the better class of white people who were friendly to the Chinese miners, they stealthily watched them and when a favorable opportunity arrived, pounced down upon them and plundered them, sometimes those of several camps in one night. If the victims resisted, they maimed or murdered them without scruple. It was counted rather a sport, like a deer or bear hunt, to rush into a Chinese mining camp at midnight, wake the occupants with hellish yells, discharge their pistols among them and plunder the tents or cabins of whatever was valuable.[42]

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[42]Speer, William, op. cit., p.574.

As these robbers and murderers were often quite conscientious, they often satisfied their minds that it was a religious duty to rob and shoot heathen. A Mexican, who was hung at Mariposa much against his judgment of what was right or wrong, protested to the last that although he had killed and robbed a good many Chinese, he did not feel that Christian people should hang him for it. The Americans, however, took a dim view of his plea and swung him to the limb of a tree.[43]

Another occasion found the wheels of justice turning in favor of the persecutors when a band of armed white men swooped down on a Chinese settlement on the Yuba River where several hundred Chinamen had purchased claims and set up an extensive mining operation. Attacking the unsuspecting Celestials with unearthly yells and pistol shots, they soon put the Chinese to flight. They then proceeded to strip the little community of all valuables, set fire to the buildings, and declared themselves the proprietors of the claim by right of possession.

Some friends of the Chinese brought suit against these scroundels before the local justice for the return of the property. In defense the men set up a remarkable plea, that "they thought the Chinamen could not work the claim to so good advantage as they could." The judge gave a decision in their favor on the grounds of this plea! An attempt to bring the

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[43] Ibid., p.574.

thieves to justice before a higher court was impossible for the Orientals were not permitted, according to law, to bear witness against white men.[44]

For the most part, the bandits of the vicinity were unglamorous, cold-hearted killers, stopping solitary travelers and often leaving the bodies where they fell without so much as dragging them off the road. If they could put a day's ride between themselves and retribution they felt quite safe. They especially picked on Chinese victims as offering even less chance for an unpleasant aftermath.

Among the lawless bands roaming the highways was Joaquin Murieta, a young Sonoran, who was chief of a considerable company of natives. His robberies were innumerable and were usually accompanied by murders. His followers thought nothing of riding up to a miners' tent and shooting the inmates before they realized the danger. Chinamen were killed like a covey of quail. His henchman, Manual Garcia, known as "Three-Fingered Jack", was particularly fond of killing Chinamen. At Murphys Diggings Joaquin and his band robbed a camp of six Chinamen one night, on which occasion Garcia got the trembling Mongolians in a row before him and tied their queues together. Then he drew his immense bowie knife and began slowly and deliberately cutting their throats, one after the other, and enjoying their frantic shrieks. He felt it was a kind of luxury to cut their

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[44] Ibid., p.573.

throats for it was such easy work to kill them.

Frequently Joaquin and his band would descend on a helpless Chinese camp, catch all the frightened pigtails they could, and tie them up by their queues for hours to make them disclose the hiding place of their gold dust. It seemed to be a form of recreation for them, after making a forage on some white rancho.

Many attempts were made to capture Murieta and his band but since they had the fleetest horses in the country with relays in the hands of confederates, they were never approached nearer than a mile or two by their pursuers. At length the governor of the state offered a reward of one thousand dollars for his capture, dead or alive. To this reward the Chinese contributed three thousand dollars more, and soon it was increased to five thousand dollars. Murieta, being in Stockton in disguise, saw the handbill offering the reward for his capture. Taking a pencil from his pocket, he wrote underneath the notice, "I will offer $10,000 myself" and signed his name. Nevertheless the reward offered by the governor and the Chinese proved sufficient to hunt him down, and he was finally surprised and killed, both he and Garcia. When the news reached Chinese Camp a holiday was declared by the Mongolians, who celebrated the news with much fizzling and popping of firecrackers.[45]

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[45]McLeod, Alexander, op. cit., p.60.

The Chinese were not only persecuted by Joaquin Murieta and his band, but many other foreigners frequently took a hand in the matter. This sometimes led to affrays between the persecutors and Americans. One of these affrays occurred in a mining camp on the American River. A company of Australians, who owned a claim on the river bar, sold it to some Chinamen. They had taken great precautions to "salt" it well before offering it for sale, for it had been condemned as worthless. The Mongolians purchased the claim for five hundred dollars, and by their close hard work soon developed a mine that yielded them sixteen dollars a day to the hand. The Australians hearing of the lucky strike procured another gang of ruffians like themselves to chase the almond-eyed miners out and retake the claim. A company of American miners, who were operating on the same bar, were appealed to by the Chinese, and after a careful investigation of the facts, firmly informed the ruffians that they had to give up the property. This they refused to do, which raised a fighting issue with the Americans, who immediately armed themselves and escorted the white foreigners out of the camp.[46]

The Chileans seemed to give the Chinese quite a bit of trouble in the mines for there are several accounts recorded of their persecutions. During the spring of 1853 there was a gang of Chileans encamped below Jackson who pretended to

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[46] Ibid., p.60.

work in the mines occasionally, but in reality they depended on robbery for a livelihood. One night they made a raid on some Chinese who worked near the Chilean encampment, killing one Chinaman and stealing several hundred dollars worth of gold dust. One of the Chileans was captured by the Chinese so one Chinaman went to Jackson for assistance. Fifty armed miners came to the rescue and executed the prisoner whom the infuriated Chinese had tortured by cutting him to pieces, a small piece at a time. Death by the rope was welcomed by the prisoner![47]

The conduct of the Chinese under their accumulated trials was wonderfully prudent, conciliatory and respectful. They did not attempt to organize resistance to those who oppressed and injured them, even where they had the power temporarily to do so; they knew that this would fearfully react upon them. They patiently bore what they could not avoid. If driven from one place, they quietly went to work at another. In their intercourse with the whites they were charitable to the suffering and ready to give in to public claims. Thus they won the cordial friendship of the more respectable and moral classes who became acquainted with them. Many, unable to make a living at the mines, began to branch out into more remunerative occupations. They hired out as household servants and as laborers as mining camps flourished,

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[47] Ibid., p.68.

they established stores and laundries, bars and restaurants in many of the mining towns when they learned there were many ways to secure the glittering yellow metal besides mining for it in worn-out claims. Thus the Chinese quarters in California began to assume the appearance of the streets of their native cities.

The first Chinese woman in the diggings sat behind the bar of a Chinese store in Sonora, dressed in European style, and served drinks to the white miners. This bar became a noted establishment among the white miners, who came to spend their gold freely with the almond-eyed damsel, while the Chinese proprietor entertained his guests with music played on Chinese musical instruments. Many of the white miners had never seen a Chinese woman before, and she proved a greater drawing card than did the proprietor's music or liquor.[48]

As the majority of gold miners of the early days spent their gold freely as if they thought it would always be available, it was the astute Chinaman who took advantage of the opportunities awaiting him in catering to the rough, horny-handed miners who gathered in his store during the evenings and on Sundays.

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[48] Ibid., p.47.

III

EXPULSION FROM THE MINES

By 1854 the Chinese in California were an important factor but still not sufficiently disturbing to the white man to bring about any sustained effort to banish him. The Chinese laborer was consistently the butt of the white miner. He was beaten and robbed; he was at the mercy of anyone who felt like fleecing him. As has already been pointed out, thieves in the mines found the Chinese their easiest victims and had little compunction about murdering them. Nevertheless, on the whole, John Chinaman was still a jest, something to laugh at rather than to grow serious about. Undoubtedly that was why so much was made of the two Chinese Wars. Each was in its way a circus, a performance put on by an alien group for the entertainment of the white man.

But in a little while antagonisms arose. The Chinaman's style of living was found to be less costly than the white man's and he could afford to work a little cheaper than his white neighbor.[49] It was found that the Chinaman did too much work and did it too well for the money he received. It was said that he could not be assimilated and become a part of the

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[49]Gibson, Otis, Chinese in America, p.225.

American people. He appeared to look upon everything from a totally different standpoint to the rest of mankind, as represented by the rest of the forty-niners. Many of the Chinese turned their spare hours into further gainful employment and maintained small garden plots where it would have been impossible for the average Caucasian to raise anything. There appeared to be no limit to the cussedness of this heathen. He could work at any trade, do anything, and do it well. These traits proved a source of great aggravation to his white brothers.

Many other things conspired to make the Chinaman obnoxious to the white man. Good and bad times alternated without the least effect upon the Chinaman. Other working men might starve but he always seemed to have money. Everything he touched seemed to turn to gold. This would not have been so bad if he could have been induced to spend it in a civilized manner. He didn't get drunk, never went on a spree like the white miners, never "painted the town red". His living expenses were negligible. In due time, the heathen Chinee was introduced to the mysteries of the great American game of draw poker in order to transfer some of his money to the pockets of those who knew better what to do with it, that is, how to spend it in a civilized and Christian manner. The game served in changing the ownership of money, but not in the direction that the white man had confidently hoped, for it is on record that the heathen Chinee, by "ways that were dark and tricks that were vain," very soon collared all the cash, and this "at the game

he did not understand." And the cry went up: "We are ruined by Chinese cheap labor!"[50]

No sooner had the Chinaman learned a little English and accumulated a little capital than he went into trade, and by his cleanliness and by selling cheap for cash, he managed to capture the trade of a large number of the white people. Many of the Chinese used their capital to purchase old and worked-out gold mines that had been abandoned by their owners; others purchased the tailings that had been already worked by the white man. By great skill and care, working long hours and seven days a week, they extracted a lot of gold and became a prosperous community. This greatly exasperated the white man, and new tactics were invented to abate this unbearable nuisance. Every means of civilizing the heathen Chinee having been tried and having ignominously failed, new and special laws were passed which did not apply to the white men. The Chinaman was taxed and retaxed, then taxed again; he was arrested and fined; he was imprisoned and abused and lied about; the rough stoned and murdered him; even the little boys annoyed and persecuted him.[51]

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[50] See Appendix. . Bret Harte's poem about the "heathen Chinee" written in 1870 contains a record of Ah Sin's discomfiture at the hand of Bill Nye for the crime of holding more aces in his sleeve than his antagonist. Nye's course of reasoning and the "remedial agency" which he so promptly adopted in the case cited form the finest satire on California enemies of the Chinaman that was ever uttered. (cf., "Chinese in California", Scribner's Monthly, v.13 (Jan. 1877) pp.414)

[51] Maxim, H. S., "Chinese and the South African Labour Question", Fortnightly, v.79 (March 1903) pp.506-509.

Because of these antagonisms it did not take long before miners who were prejudiced against foreigners in general began to move against the Chinese in particular for they constituted the largest single body of unnaturalized foreigners in the state. They claimed that individuals of a community ought to exist only by supplying the wants of others, and when a man neither did this nor had any wants of his own but such as he provided for himself, he was of no use to his neighbors. In addition when such a man diminished the productiveness of the country, he was a positive disadvantage to the community and in proportion to the amount of wealth he removed, was a downright public nuisance. Therefore, according to their views, the Chinese, though the best, most faithful, most easily managed, and most reliable of all laborers, and though all their labor and a large portion of their wealth remained in California, were very destructive and detrimental to the interests of the community.

Early in the year 1852 Chinese miners were driven from several mining districts of the Sierra Nevadas, generally peacefully, because they made no resistance. The question of permitting the Chinamen to labor in the mines soon became the principal topic of discussion in the mining camps. And suddenly the current of public opinion changed. It was thought the Chinese immigration was injurious to the country because it was temporary in its character. It was not strenuously contended that this class of foreigners interfered directly with

the interests of American-born citizens. It was never alleged that they jostled our miners but that they gathered the gold to carry it away to enrich a foreign country.

One of the earliest enactments against the Chinese was in the Columbia mining district, Tuolumne County, where a mass meeting was held condemning certain shipowners, capitalists, and merchants for flooding the mines with Asiatics. They resolved to take the matter in their own hands, and deny any Asiatic or South Sea Islander the right to mine in their district, either for himself or for others. These resolutions became a part of their mining laws and the other mining camps were advised of the actions of the Columbia miners regarding the supposed Chinese menace.

The excitement in opposition to the Chinese soon became intense in many parts of the mining country. Many of the mining camps where large numbers of Chinamen were working over the old and exhausted gulches soon took up the cry, "California for Americans!" The Marysville mining district took immediate action with a mass meeting at which it was declared that "no Chinaman shall henceforth be allowed on any mining claim in the neighborhood."[52]

Along the north fork of the American River, bands of white miners immediately started an expulsion of over three hundred Chinese from their claims. And at Horseshoe Bar they

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[52]McLeod, Alexander, op. cit., p.68.

removed four hundred Celestials from their claims in an orderly manner, even assisting them to dismantle their tents.

A few weeks after the initial mass meeting at Columbia, the miners of El Dorado County turned back all stages carrying Chinese passengers and freight while the white inhabitants of Weber Creek burned the tents, merchandise and mining equipment of many Chinese in the district.

One mining community after another not only passed general resolutions condemning the Chinese but in many cases posted notices ordering them out of the district. The following notice posted in Mariposa and other towns of the Agua Fria Creek district in 1856 is typical:

> Notice is hereby given to all Chinese on the Agua Fria and its tributaries, to leave within ten days, from this date, any failing to comply shall be subjected to thirty-nine lashes, and moved by the force of arms.[53]

The Mariposa Gazette, in commenting upon the notice, observed blandly that to carry weight it should have been signed so that "John" might be apprised just why and by whom he was to be whipped.[54] Some of the Chinese, however, did not take the order so lightly--they fled before the ten days were up. Those who remained, secure in the idea that an unsigned notice carried no weight, were promptly beaten after being forced into the open by the ever efficient method of setting

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[53]Dobie, Charles Caldwell, op. cit., p.51.

[54]Dobie, loc. cit.

fire to their cabins.

Some of the communities were a little more concerned with justice and ethics than those along the Agua Fria. At Vallecito, for instance, any Chinese who owned mining claims were exempted from the ten-day order and were given ninety days in which to sell out and leave. Perhaps it was less nuisance to get legal possession of a claim at a forced sale than to beat it out of the owner physically.

The first movements toward expulsion were directed against Chinese working mining claims; later they spread to merchants and laborers in the towns themselves. Two years after the notice had been posted warning Chinese off claims in the Agua Fria district, the town of Mariposa took steps to rid itself of their presence. Under the pretext that the Chinese quarter was a fire hazard they forced property owners not to rent or renew leases to Chinamen. Their contention was based on the fact that Chinese used fires in open pans instead of stoves for cooking, that they shot off firecrackers on their feast days, and that they were continually burning punk sticks before their gods.[55]

Town meetings, miners' conventions, and legislative bodies tore the dictionary apart in an attempt to make the simplest statements about the Chinese menace impressive. The public was bombarded by alliterative and redundant resolutions,

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[55] Ibid., p.52.

resolutions whose real content was drowned in a heavy sea of words. A minority report by a committee on Mines and Mining Interests exploded this bomb in the face of a defenseless public:

> RESOLVED: That their presence here is a great moral and social evil--a disgusting scab upon the fair face of society--a putrefying sore upon the body politic--in short, a nuisance.[56]

By what formidable and circuitous routes did the committee arrive at its conclusions! Here is the gist of its argument all but smothered in the barrage of denunciations preceding it.

Unsettled as the late fifties were in respect to the presence of Chinese in the mining regions, it remained for the Shasta region to stage the first serious disturbance. Until now the authorities had been for the most part passive; district conventions met, order to vacate claims were posted, the Chinese left and that was the end of it. To be sure the county tax collectors grumbled but there were few clashes between the vigilante committees and enforcers of the law. Early in 1859 a county convention of miners was called for the purpose of devising the best means of ridding themselves of the presence of the almond-eyed sons of the Orient and vigilante committees were formed to drive them out with terrorism and force. In March a gang of a hundred or more miners in the vicinity of Horsetown rounded up all the Chinese

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[56] Dobie, loc. cit.

in that area and proceeded to escort them beyond the borders of the district. The sheriff with a posse awaited this wholesale kidnapping party on the line of march, but the rioters, hearing of the sheriff's move, changed their course, heading for the town of Shasta and collecting all the Chinese along the way. The sheriff finally caught up with them and rescued some seventy-five hapless Chinamen. The situation grew so serious that the governor of the state sent one hundred and seventeen guns and ammunition by river boat as far as Stockton and enlisted the aid of the sheriff there to assist the Shasta authorities in restoring order. This outburst was serious enough to have been referred to as the War in Shasta County. Evidence of these riotous days is marked by a location in the Shasta region that still bears the name of Igo, presumably for the invariable retort of Chinese miners ordered to quit the territory was, "I go!"[57] In folk etymology the name is associated with nearby Ono, which supposedly was named when one of the Chinamen said, "Oh, no!" when American prospectors tried to drive him away from this site, too.[58]

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[57] Ibid., p.53.

[58] Gudde, Erwin G., California Place Names, p.159. Several stories are told of this naming, notably: A Mr. McPherson, one of the first miners to build a substantial house, had a small son who, whenever his father went to the mine, would put on his own hat and say, "I go!" and invariably his father would answer, "Oh, no!" When the appellation Igo became affixed to the place, a neighboring camp about six miles away became known as Ono. (cf., Hoover and Rensch, "Shasta County", Historic Spots in California, p.161)

It was the saddest feature of the terrible trials of the Chinese that so many of them were inflicted in the name of the law. The license law of the state subjected all foreigners not eligible to citizenship to a monthly tax of four dollars. This was applied by the tax-collectors solely to the case of the Chinese. An army of them ranged continuously over the diggings equipped with blank licenses. All Chinese in the camp were compelled to pay the mining license, whether or not they were actually engaged in mining. The collectors frequently came back before the month was out, or one would follow another, giving fictitious receipts. If the Chinese refused to pay, they were struck, stabbed or shot. Sometimes the collector tied them to a tree and whipped them; at other times, he might drive them on foot with a horsewhip, riding behind them lashing them as they ran, to some other town where he could exercise other compulsory measures. The collectors in turn were often followed by cormorants to whom they sold the property of Chinese which had been "forfeited" for non-payment. At other times in sheer wantonness these officials would destroy bedding, boots and other articles.[59]

The men who committed all these atrocities felt secure because 1) comparatively few Chinese could speak English or knew how to obtain justice; 2) the officers of justice were too often under the control of the men who committed the

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[59]Speer, William, op. cit., p.575.

offenses, and if they wanted to remain in office they must close their eyes to what went on in the name of justice; and 3) under a ruling laid down by the Supreme Court of California in 1855, no Chinese could testify against a white man.

Whenever possible the Chinese evaded the tax collector. When he made his appearance at a village a runner was sent to the next to warn the inhabitants. There the Chinese would pick up and move into the foothills for a few days until they supposed the collector had gone; then they returned to the mines. The way of the tax collector, either upright or dishonest, was not easy. At the merest rustle of leaves kicked up by their approach the Chinamen fled like rabbits. They might have been American millionaires, so diligent were they in attempted tax evasions. It became the habit to go after them in the still of the night and drag them from their bunks to make them disclose their caches.

If the victims could not put immediate hands upon a tax receipt, they were made to pay again. If any member of a group of Chinese was approached for taxes and lacked money to pay, the minions of the law demanded that his companions produce the money. If they refused, their pigtails were tied together and they were beaten into submission. This tying together of pigtails to prevent the escape of Chinese seemed to be one of the pleasant outdoor sports of tax collectors and ruffians in the early days of the state. Undoubtedly a goodly proportion of gold dust collected was diverted into

their own pockets. Many county treasurers were known to have commented sourly on the fact that comparatively little of the money actually collected ever found its way into the public coffers. Even at that the yield was astounding for those days and there came a time when, aside from the capitalists, the Chinaman's only friends were the county treasurers.[60]

When the tax collectors gave the hapless Chinaman a brief respite the thieves and gangsters got busy. These adroit gentlemen were even better at tying queues together than their brethren of the law and they had even more subtle ways of making their yellow brethren disgorge gold dust.

Even the lowly Digger Indians took their petty cut in tax collecting. They had a supreme contempt for all Chinese and never let an opportunity pass to torment and impose upon them. The Indians, having watched the tax collectors and having noticed the methods used in collecting public funds, took the public work with zeal and started out on their similar mission as soon as the official had departed. Should the Chinaman demur, the savage would levy on his gold rocker and he would be forced to fork over the required revenue.[61]

In 1855 the Legislature passed an Act increasing the Foreign Miner's Tax two dollars a month from the first of October of each year and providing that no foreigner should be

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[60] Dobie, Charles Caldwell, op. cit., p.49.

[61] McLeod, Alexander, op. cit., p.66.

permitted to hold or to work in any mining claim unless he should pay his monthly taxes. This action of the Legislature was intended to accomplish the removal of all the Chinese from the mining regions. It provided that all foreigners, not eligible to become citizens of the U.S., residing in any mining district in the state should be considered miners and subject to this tax. It also provided that any person or company employing these foreign miners should be held liable for the payment of this tax. In April, 1856, the law increasing the foreign miner's tax was repealed and the tax placed again at four dollars a month. The Chinese were largely indebted to the Rev. William Speer's indefatigable service for this action in their favor. In a speech given before the Legislature in 1856 on the Chinese question, he said in part:

> For two years past, a very large portion of the gold taken from the mines has been the product of Chinese labor; and the traders in mining localities can attest that a very small portion of this has ever been carried out of the country, the assertions of city editors to the contrary notwithstanding. Chinese labor has literally kept alive the trade of most of the mining towns during the past season. The richer mines--all claimed or owned by the whites--have been poorly supplied with water; little work has been done, and little gold has therefore been drawn from this quarter. But all the time the patient, plodding Johns have been delving among the rocks and ravines of the foothills--in places where a white man would starve, rather than work at all.
>
> John Chinaman always has a little money; because he must and will work, whether he earns much or little. He must have cash or starve, for he can't get trusted for his food, and so he comes 'down with the dust'. In this way, and by means of the oppressive tax which he pays for the privilege of laboring, he contributes more to sustain trade, and

> support a government which refuses him the least protection, than many worse specimens of humanity of a more favored race, who affect to sneer at him as being no better than a brute. Let justice be done though the heavens fall, and let it be done to John Chinaman.[62]

When the state officials endeavored to exclude the Chinamen from the mines, they soon discovered that the Chinese were paying the larger amount of the total monies collected by the tax collectors in the mining districts. Many of the counties in the mining districts could not have existed without the revenue from this tax. At the same time, the strong anti-Chinese feeling which was coming to the fore, intensified by race antipathy, was seized upon by the politicians as the most effective means of securing the vote of the miners who constituted the largest body of voters outside of San Francisco.[63]

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[62] Gibson, Otis, op. cit., p.237.

[63] McLeod, Alexander, op. cit., p.65.

IV

CONCLUSION

At first there was little anti-Chinese feeling among the Americans. Such attacks as the Chinese suffered seemed to have been merely incidental to their incomprehensible language, their strange customs and their heathen religion, which set them apart from the Spanish-American and European elements who swarmed on California in the wake of the discovery of gold. Most people found the Chinese made industrious residents of the settlements in which they located. They kept to themselves and were rarely engaged in brawls. The white merchants appreciated them as customers as they were scrupulously honest, even though oftentimes frugal. They paid promptly for every article they bought. By and large, John Chinaman was a jest, something to laugh at rather than to grow serious about. Thus early gold rush days found the Chinaman well established as a law-abiding citizen of the many communities in the mining districts.

The principle aggravation the Chinese gave the miners was their enormous immigration and cheap labor, coupled with the fact that they insisted on remaining Chinese. This made the immigration more noticeable, and soon racial prejudice and jealously among the hoodlum element in the mines started a

chain of propaganda which exploded on the hapless Chinaman. From a thoroughly democratic willingness to accept individuals on the basis of ability as demonstrated in performance, the attitude among the miners soon ranged from amusement at outlandish practices, to indifference, condescension, discrimination, and cruelty. As the Chinaman had no redress unless an American was witness to the deed and came in with the law to his relief, he was at the mercy of any one who felt like harassing him. The law winked at almost any sort of shenanigans where the Chinese were involved, particularly when it came to collecting the Foreign Miner's Tax levied against them early in their mining ventures.

As the hysteria mounted the charges against these Orientals grew more and more ridiculous, and as they were fanned into flame by the reporters of this era, people all over California believed them because they wanted to believe that all the things they could not understand about these aliens were objectionable and valid reasons for their expulsion from the mining communities. It seems a fair question to ask, in the face of the charges levied against the poor Chinee, whether the treatment meted out to this heathen was such that he saw a marked superiority of Christianity over heathenism. What would a heathen naturally think of a Christianity that greeted him with a howl on his arrival in a country, followed him with discriminating laws and regulations, public contempt, and unhindered abuse during the time of his residence? How could

the white man condone his own passion for strong drink and object to a pipe or two of opium smoked by his yellow compatriot? If the Chinaman arrived in this country without his wife, so did other tens of thousands who joined the gold rush; if he sent his money home, so did many other immigrants to these shores; if he operated dens of iniquity, whose unrebuked example did he follow? If he was addicted to gambling, since when had gambling gone out of fashion in California? If he came out the winner in a game which was set up to fleece him, who can blame him for cheating?

The Chinese immigrant went about his business in his quiet, self-effacing, inoffensive way, ran his laundry or little shop in the camps, and contented himself with working over the gold claims that white men had abandoned. Working for a few cents an hour from early morning till late at night, thriving under a standard of living American civilization could not survive, given to strange customs, wearing strange clothes, worshipping strange gods, the Chinese were ridiculed, feared, disliked and persecuted in nearly every community in the state. No one can justify the treatment the Chinese received at the hands of those who were supposed to represent democracy, equality of opportunity, and fair play. The proper solution of the problem called for reason, justice and common sense. Instead, it was met by mob violence, un-American race persecution, and the worst forms of political propaganda.

It is my conclusion that the rabble-rousers forced the

exclusion of a class of people by creating animosities which arose almost entirely from racial repugnance and not from any interference in American interests.

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APPENDIX

PLAIN LANGUAGE FROM TRUTHFUL JAMES
(TABLE MOUNTAIN, 1870)

by Bret Harte

Which I wish to remark,
  And my language is plain,
That for ways that are dark
  And for tricks that are vain,
The heathen Chinee is peculiar,
  Which the same I would rise to explain.

Ah Sin was his name;
  And I shall not deny,
In regard to the same,
  What that name might imply;
But his smile it was pensive and childlike,
  As I frequent remarked to Bill Nye.

It was August the third,
  And quite soft was the skies;
Which it might be inferred
  That Ah Sin was likewise;
Yet he played it that day upon William
  And me in a way I despise.

Which we had a small game,
  And Ah Sin took a hand:
It was Euchre. The same
  He did not understand;
But he smiled as he sat by the table,
  With the smile that was childlike and bland.

Yet the cards they were stocked
  In a way that I grieve,
And my feelings were shocked
  At the state of Nye's sleeve,
Which was stuffed full of aces and bowers,
  And the same with intent to deceive.

But the hands that were played
  By that heathen Chinee,
And the points that he made,
  Were quite frightful to see,--
Till at last he put down a right bower,
  Which the same Nye had dealt unto me.